



Bruce Boats
Kennet & Avon Canal Trust

Member of the
Accessible Waterways
Association



Hirer's Guide

2024

This guide provides self-drive hirers with essential information to prepare for and safely enjoy your holiday with Bruce Boats.



Introduction

Whether you are an old hand or a newcomer to Bruce Boats this guide provides essential information to help you prepare for a safe and enjoyable cruise. You should read it well before your cruise and offer it to any of your party who will be helping you. Firstly, please look at our training videos introduced by Timothy West. You can find them, along with other useful links, at

www.bruceboats.katrust.org.uk/holiday-hire/useful-documents/

You should also be familiar with the Canal and River Trust's publication **The Boaters Handbook**.

On board your boat you will find printed copies of **The Boater's Handbook**, our **Route Planning Guide**, a **Boat User Manual**, this **Hirer's Guide** and various maps of the canal and local area.



This symbol shows topics covered by our training videos



This symbol highlights an important safety topic.

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What we do

Bruce Boats, formerly the Bruce Trust, is now a part of the Kennet and Avon Canal Trust and have been providing affordable canal holidays to disabled, disadvantaged or older people along with their family, friends or carers for over 30 years.

Our purpose-built, wheelchair accessible boats are based at Great Bedwyn Wharf, near Hungerford. We are ideally situated for a cruise east towards Hungerford, Newbury and Reading, or westward through the Bruce Tunnel, Honeystreet and on to Devizes and the magnificent Caen Hill Locks Flight. Bruce Boats are available for weekly hire for self-catering, self-steer holidays. Both shorter and longer periods of hire can be arranged on request.

When not out on self-drive hire Bruce Boats are available for day trips for up to 12 passengers with a Bruce Boats Skipper and Crew.

Our Boats

Bruce Boats has a fleet of four wide-beam boats. Hannah sleeps 12, Diana 10, Rebecca 8 and Rachel sleeps 6. Each boat has quality accommodation and flexibility for people with a wide variety of special needs. Bruce Boats have boarding ramps and electrically operated lifts to enable safe and easy access for wheel chair users and the extra width of our boats provides excellent maneuverability for them. All our boats have central heating, spacious wet rooms with showers and electric fresh water flush toilets. Transfer hoist, shower chair, commode, perching stool, cot-sides are available on request.

We also have a narrow-beam boat, Lady Hilda, which sleeps nine. Lady Hilda is available for use by community youth groups.

Training

Do I need training before hiring a Bruce Boat?

Bruce accessible boats are wide beam and steered by a tiller from the back of the boat. They are specially designed and equipped with boarding ramps and hydraulic lifts. Our guests include people with physical disabilities and other special needs. Bruce Boats are committed to safe boating and because our boats are larger and different, in both design and in use, to many other canal boats, for self-drive hire we ask that hirers either have relevant boating experience, or undertake training with us. We strongly encourage novice boaters to come for a training weekend with us. This takes a lot of the stress out of the holiday by knowing what to expect in advance. Alternatively, we can provide a volunteer trainer to accompany you on the first couple of days of your holiday until you feel confident.

For those who wish to take their boating skills to another level, we offer training up to NCBA Certificate in Community Boat Management. If you would be interested in attending this training course, let us know.

Organisation

To get the best out of your cruise we suggest you begin your preparations a few weeks before you come to Great Bedwyn. Have a look at The Boaters Handbook and our training videos. You will need to set aside one or two evenings, but the time spent is invaluable.

Crew



You will ideally need at least three people to work the boat. One person needs to oversee working the boat, the **Skipper**: The skipper can change from day to day, or be in charge for the entire cruise. The **Helm** is the person who steers the boat and the **Crew** help by keeping a lookout, mooring and working the locks.

Clothing



Even on a warm summer's day, the canal climate can be considerably cooler than you would expect so it is wise to have with you several layers of warm clothing. Non-slip footwear is essential, sturdy shoes or trainers are good, walking boots better if the weather is wet. Please do not allow crew or passengers to work the boat, or work a lock, when wearing flimsy footwear.

Remember the sun's rays are more powerful when you are on the water, sunglasses, a sun hat and sunscreen are recommended to avoid burning. We cannot guarantee the weather will always be dry and sunny so effective **waterproof clothing**, unfortunately, **is also essential!**

Food

Some of our guests prefer to be self-sufficient preparing all their meals on board while others like to make use of the attractive pubs and restaurants, which can be found along the canal in nearby towns and villages. However, they may not be open when you arrive or on a Sunday evening, nor perhaps on a Monday.

When shopping for provisions the canal is well served when travelling east towards Hungerford and Newbury, which have large supermarkets conveniently located for the canal. Please be aware that when travelling west towards Devizes your choice is much more limited and you will need to plan ahead as the first opportunity to buy provisions in this direction is a small supermarket at Pewsey and a bit of a walk from the canal.

There are two small shops in Great Bedwyn one of which is open 8 am until late. It is also possible to arrange a supermarket delivery to your boat at Great Bedwyn. The address is Great Bedwyn Wharf, SN8 3PB. Please quote the name of your boat and choose a time slot from 12.30pm when you will be present to receive your delivery.

You may want to bring sufficient food supplies for a couple of days cruising. However, space for food storage is limited.

Cooking

Your boat is well equipped with a 4-burner gas cooker with oven and grill, a microwave oven and a fridge with a small freezer compartment. It will also have all the necessary cooking utensils, crockery etc. **Please bring your own tea cloths.**

Bedding

We DO NOT supply bedding for your holiday. Please bring pillows, sheets and blankets or duvets to suit the boat layout and your party's needs or sleeping bags if you prefer. Boat beds tend to be 'firm' and you may wish to bring your own 'soft toppers'. Where appropriate please also bring mattress protectors.

Fresh Water

Your boat has a large storage tank for fresh water under the floor in the bow. This will be full at the start of your trip and we suggest that you top it up daily at the various water points along the canal. Water from the galley cold tap is filtered and safe to drink.

Shower Room and Toilets

Hand wash and a roll of toilet paper are provided in each toilet area. Waste water from shower use pumps away automatically. **Please bring your own towels.**

Toilet use and care

The type of toilet installed varies from boat to boat but common to all is that they are flushed using water from the on-board fresh water storage tank and the toilet contents empty into holding tanks. These holding tanks will be empty at the start of your trip. It is essential that after flushing the toilet you check that the flap in the base of the toilet has returned to the fully closed position and water has stopped running into the basin. If this simple check is missed and water continues to run then your holding tanks will fill quickly and your fresh water storage tank will empty quickly! Used correctly the toilet storage tanks have sufficient capacity for a week's holiday hire.

If your trip is longer than a week then it is likely they will need a pump-out, which can be done for you by most boatyards along the canal for a small fee. The Canal & River Trust has also installed self-operated pump-out stations at various points. These are quite simple to use following the instructions provided but require a CRT pump-out card, which we can supply if necessary. When buying toilet rolls, please avoid the quilted type, your boat's toilet does not like them! Two-ply toilet paper is best. Use land based toilet facilities when you can.

Electrical

Our boats are not fitted with TVs, DVD players or radios, and while some may think this a little old fashioned most of our users enjoy being away from electronic entertainment for the duration of their holiday. We do, however, have 230v electrics with normal 3 pin plugs and USB charging points.

There is a limit to what can be run but charging your mobile phone or laptop should be fine so bring your USB cable and charger with you. Please do not bring your hair dryer though, it is probably much too powerful for our electrical system, we do supply a 12v hair dryer instead.

A **good torch** is very useful on a dark, unlit towpath and for reading the combination padlocks to enter the boat at night.

Other Items

Other personal items could include a wash kit, maybe a bath mat, any adapted cutlery or crockery used and don't forget any necessary medication.

You may like to bring books, games and cards for your entertainment and binoculars for the wildlife: Red Kites, Kingfishers and Herons are frequently seen.

Please use a soft holdall or bag, not a rigid suitcase because there will be nowhere to stow it.

Route Planning

Maps other sources of information



There will be a route-planning guide and useful maps on board. If you wish to buy your own, the recommended books are:

Collins Nicholson Waterways Guides No. 7: River Thames and Southern Waterways
Pearson's Canal Companion: Kennet & Avon, River Thames

How far can I travel in a day?

You will be enjoying life in the slow lane, so do not attempt to travel too far in one day. Once you set off it will not be long before you come to a lock. It is best to allow about 20 minutes traveling through the lock although you may have to queue if the canal is busy.

1 lock roughly equates to 1 mile in travelling time. We call that a lock-mile. Therefore, if you plan a day's trip of, say, 12 miles, with 3 locks on the way, that will be 15 lock miles at an average speed of 3mph = 5 hours travelling time. With several relaxing breaks, that is a good day's passage. Mooring spaces are sometimes hard to find, so planning to end your day early (say at 4pm) makes mooring easier and gives time to explore your surroundings.

Remember that when you pass moored boats you need to be at your slowest speed (we call this "tickover"). This is very important: many boats are people's homes, and they are quick to complain if a passing boat creates too much wash and spills their coffee! Your tickover speed is about 2mph, and there are lots of places on the canal where you will not go faster than this for quite a long stretch.

Cruising Limits



Your Bruce Boats cruising area is restricted to the Kennet and Avon Canal between Bath and Reading. If you wish to enter the River Avon at Bath or the River Thames at Reading please discuss your plans with us and obtain permission in writing to do so. There are small stretches of river to the east of Hungerford and these are usually safe to cruise but if there has been heavy rain in the days before your booking please check with us first. Hirers are not permitted to tow other craft or be towed, or to cruise after dark.

Canal and River Trust (CRT) Notices and stoppages

The Kennet and Avon Canal is owned and managed by the Canal and River Trust. Sometimes stoppages occur and other restrictions are put in place affecting navigation.

Canal & River Trust navigational and strong river flow notices must be observed whether received by email, fixed notice or staff instruction.

If your return to Bedwyn is likely to be delayed, please let us know. We recommend that hirers visit www.canalrivertrust.org.uk/notices and sign up for a free account to get email updates each time there is a new stoppage or update. Twitter users can also follow on twitter @CRTnotices.

Safety & Handling Emergencies



Do read the **Passenger Safety Checklist** on the inside cover of The Boaters Handbook. Each boat is equipped with life rings, throwing line, boat hooks, telescopic ladder and other safety equipment. You will be shown how to use these at the beginning of your cruise. One item of safety equipment you should bring is your mobile phone; please let us know if anything untoward happens. Before you set off each day complete the **Daily Check List**.

Canal boat holidays are a very safe activity and we very much hope and expect you to have an incident and entirely trouble free holiday. It would be as well, though, for all crew to look through in advance the documents on board provided for use in an emergency:

Cue Cards, summarising the safest course of action, and

Location Booklets to help you call assistance.

Accidents & incidents

Please record accidents or incidents in as much detail as you can, for our records.

In the case of serious injury, substantial damage to a boat or other property or to the environment such as pollution, contact us as soon as possible so we can provide support.

Less serious accidents and incidents including any complaints made by other parties should be done by completing the accident/incident report form carried on board your boat and handed to a member of Bruce Boats staff at the end of your holiday hire.

Boarding



Boats move a little when moored. Not much but enough to make boarding and disembarkation difficult for inexperienced boaters. **Always make sure the boat is securely tied** to the wharf or mooring stake before boarding. **Never jump** from or to the boat. **Always hold on to the boat with 3 points of contact** – you will be shown this technique at the beginning of your cruise

First Aid



Please provide your own first aid kit remembering to pack suitable medicines or other items needed by your passengers. The Red Cross offers an excellent first aid app at <http://www.redcross.org.uk/What-we-do/First-aid/Mobile-app>

Use the NHS 111 helpline service if you urgently need medical help or advice but it is not a 999 emergency.

Alarms



There will be several alarms on your boat alerting you to the dangers of smoke, carbon monoxide, or a gas leak. Should the gas alarm sound, turn the gas off and leave the boat immediately. Move yourself and your passengers about 200 metres upwind and phone our help line for assistance.

If someone has **fallen overboard**, put the **engine immediately into neutral** and throw a life-ring towards him or her, or into the lock to stop crushing the person. Then stop the boat and decide how best to deal with the situation.

When lighting the gas cooker, make sure the igniter is operated before turning on the gas. Gas is heavier than air, so any leakage will drop to the bottom of the boat and be a source of danger. **Smoking and e-cigarettes are not allowed inside the boats.**

Lifejackets

You will be asked if you wish to use lifejackets. If you do, we will show you how to wear it. Our recommendation is that, as a minimum, anyone less able bodied or unable to swim wears one when working the boat in bad weather, or when working a lock.

Working the Boat

Driving the boat



When you take over your boat, you should already be competent with the basics of steering, locking and mooring your boat.

To assist with maneuvering all our wide beam boats are fitted **bow thrusters**. If you are unfamiliar with bow thrusters, you will receive further instruction during the handover procedure at the beginning of your cruise. **Bow thrusters are easily damaged and must not be used where the water is shallow or weedy!**

Going Aground



Canals can and often do run short of water especially short pounds between locks where water levels can fluctuate on a daily basis. There is a good chance you will go aground, we all do! If you do go aground, immediately go into neutral gear and think about the best way off following this checklist:

- Try reversing, without over-revving, along your entry track
- Point the tiller towards deeper water, select forward gear. This will drive the bow harder aground but is likely to move the stern into deeper water then reverse off
- Move passengers and crew to where the boat is deeper in the water and try again
- Carefully use a pole at the bow or stern

If all else fails call us and request advice/assistance.

Swing Bridges

There are several swing bridges on the Kennet and Avon Canal, a few are motorized but the majority require considerable effort to swing and we advise using two crew members to heave where necessary. Always leave a swing bridge in the position you found it.

Signals



Agree hand signals between crew to avoid shouting over the noise of the engine. The most important sound signal to remember is the single long blast of the horn, about 5 seconds, to warn other boats of your approach at a blind bend, bridge or other obstruction.

Locks

The Kennet and Avon Canal has 104 wide beam locks along its length, the most famous being the magnificent Caen Hill flight at Devizes where 29 are grouped together over just two miles of canal. On a typical one-week cruise west to Devizes, you will encounter 14 locks and east to Newbury 20 locks all of which will have to be negotiated twice! Locks are part of the fun and the experience of canal holidays. They are an opportunity to get off the boat, indulge in some exercise and often meet and chat to other boaters. There is no denying, however, that they can be physically

demanding so ensure you have sufficient fit and competent 'crew' within your party to operate the locks safely and without the locks becoming a burden to you.

On the Kennet and Avon Canal, locks should **in general be left with all gates closed and the paddles down**. There are some locks, however, which should be left empty with the lower gate paddles raised. This is particularly important on the Crofton flight where there are no bypass weirs and excess water flows into the empty lock chamber and out through the raised bottom gate paddles. **Where a lock has to be left empty there will be a notice to that effect attached to one or more of the balance beams.**



Keep children, vulnerable or inexperienced persons under close supervision and our boat safe please!

Mooring

Where can I Moor?

It is usually best to moor against the towpath or on signed visitor moorings. Many riverbanks and the non-towpath side of canals are private property.

If your group has wheelchairs and you reach a visitor mooring too late which is then occupied, a polite request may result in you being allowed to take the bank mooring with the other boat moored next to you. It is better, however, to be at the mooring in good time. Be considerate when mooring close to homes and ensure your engine is not run between 8pm and 8am.

Signed visitor moorings are very popular particularly in towns such as Hungerford and Newbury for example, so it is best to plan to arrive early.

In Newbury there are good visitor moorings at West Mills above Town Lock and below the lock at Victoria Park. If these moorings are full it is possible to moor your Bruce boat opposite Victoria Park at the KACT private moorings at Newbury Wharf providing:

- This is for 1 or 2 nights only
- You do not interfere with the operation of the KACT trip boat which normally run on Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays from 12 until 2 pm and at other times for private charter

Where not to moor



Do NOT moor In locks, lock approaches or in lock flights, blocking taps and other services unless you are using them, near or under bridges, near weirs, near sharp bends, on the outside of bends, by blind spots, in or opposite turning points/ winding holes or on the approach to these, at junctions, on landing places for canoes, in stretches marked out for an angling match or where there are signs that prohibit mooring.

Considerate Boating

Meeting Boats

Meeting other boaters should be a pleasurable experience. Always saying hello with a smile is standard procedure on the waterways.

The normal practice when meeting boats is to slow down a little to reduce the bow wave and pass port side, (left), to port side. (i.e. drive on the right of the canal)

However, don't be afraid to pass on the other side if conditions demand such as when leaving locks or when one boat is having difficulty maintaining control. Ensure that signals are given and both parties understand.



On approaching blind bends and bridges use your horn to give a long warning blast, (five seconds), which means "Caution". Listen for the same sound coming back.




Avoid having to do "emergency stops" by approaching all hazards at the appropriate speed. **Passing and Being Passed**

Passing moored boats is easy. **JUST SLOW DOWN** well in advance. Keep well clear of the other boat. There might be reasons why you can't give a wide berth such as shallow areas or overhanging trees or perhaps because there is another boat coming in the opposite direction. But the more room you can give then the better. Try to avoid that invisible magnet that seems to draw boats together.

In general, boats do not overtake each other on the canal. If someone is very close behind you, ask if they would like to overtake, then slow down and pull in to the right side of the canal.

Speed

The speed limit on the canal is 4mph but you will only do 2 – 3mph in a widebeam boat. This is a slow to moderate walking pace. If you notice a white wave running  along at right-angles to the boat, you must slow down immediately as this causes damage to the bank.

There are times for a bit of "oomph" but often people confuse power and/or prop speed with boat speed. Use of power and prop speed may help to get you out of trouble on a windy day or help you make a tight manoeuvre but it will be more effective if you get the boat speed down first.

Please be aware that all of the Bruce Branch boats are fitted with GPS tracking, primarily to know the position and speed of a boat in the event of any incident, accident or complaint from the public.

Anglers

Pass slowly, and keep to the middle of the canal, unless they indicate for you to do otherwise. It is their responsibility to get their line out of your way – on a Sunday afternoon they may be taking part in a competition and leave it to the last minute!

Arrival, handover and return

Please aim to arrive between 12 and 12.30 on your first day, and to vacate the boat by 9am on your last day, unless agreed otherwise in advance.

Please try not to arrive early, as facilities at the wharf are limited.

Handover & Return

One of our experienced volunteers will show you through your boat, explain, and where necessary demonstrate, how everything works, provide life jackets and any additional equipment you have requested before accompanying you along the canal and usually through a couple of locks. He will ensure you are entirely comfortable

with your boat and how to handle it. Please allow about 2 hours for boarding and handover.

In compliance with the Hire Boat Code 2021 the handover procedure will include an on water trial regardless of the previous experience of the hirer.

You must hand the boat back to us at 9am on the day of your departure to allow our volunteers sufficient time to work their magic preparing the boat for its next trip. We suggest you spend your last night at Great Bedwyn Wharf, we will always leave room for you and the village is lovely with a good pub. You will have access to your vehicle(s). If you do not want to spend your last night on board leaving early please let us know so we can arrange for one of our team members to be present to take the boat back from you.

Useful Numbers:

Canal and River Trust:

Incidents (Office Hours) - 0303 040 4040: Emergency (24Hrs) - 0800 479 9947

Bruce Boats:

Breakdown Call-out and Emergency Helpline – 07442 405093